GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

December 16, 1963

Dear Nick:

You asked for suggestions regarding the FBI report on the assassination.

My principal suggestion relates to what is not in the report. It does not include evidence relating either to the number of shots which were fired or to the injuries sustained (with the exception of the one found in the President's back). To shut off damaging speculation, I think it is important that the report buttress the fact that only three shots were heard, that the first one hit the President in the back (and did not exit), that the second shot hit Governor Connally and lodged in his leg, and that the third shot hit the President in the head. I have no reason to know that what I have just stated are indeed the facts; but if they are, I think that it is important to have it laid on the record fairly promptly. For example most people are assuming that the President had an injury in the front of the neck and, furthermore, that that injury was from the entrance (not exit) of a bullet. Evidence of this kind, especially when the pictures indicate that the President was facing forward leads one to infer that two assassins were at work.

I have some criticism regarding the style used in various places. I think it is important that the evidence be stated as such and that conclusions be avoided in the statement of the evidence. For example, as I recall my quick reading, there is a statement on page 9 referring to Oswald's murder of Tippit. There are references throughout the report to the "window" as the one "from which the shots were fired." etc. As I say, this is a matter of style. But I think that the persuasive value of the document would be increased (should it ever be made public) if the document does not give the implication that the authors had made up their minds as to the implications of the evidence before the evidence was stated.

With respect to the exhibits, I suggest that the fingerprint and bullet exhibits show -- so everyone can see -- the comparisons. That is, Exhibits 5 and 6 might show not only the prints found at the scene but also Oswald's own prints; Exhibit 23 likewise could show not only the bullet found on the stretcher but also a comparison of its striations with those of a bullet fired from the Italian gun.

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Some miscellaneous remarks: Exhibit 18 is a poor photograph. One bullet is not accounted for at all in the report. There is no reference to a paraffin test on Oswald's face. The selection of Exhibits 15 and 16 as handwriting standards is humorous (one unnecessarily suggests that Oswald may have been out to get the Governor rather than the President and the other unnecessarily raises the question why the State Department acted so quickly in granting Oswald a passport!) The report does not explain where the clip for the rifle is (no separate clip appears in the photographs). Page 43 inadvertently gives the impression that psychiatrists were intent primarily on teaching Oswald to salute the flag!

I am impressed by the effectiveness of the FBI in pulling together all this information so rapidly. Please do not construe the above suggestions as reflecting on their work in any way -- which has been remarkable.

Sincerely,

John T. McNaughton

Honorable Nicholas deB. Katzenbach
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